

*Rethinking the Twentieth-Century History of Mumbai**

History, Culture and the Indian City: Essays by Rajnarayan Chandavarkar.

By RAJNARAYAN CHANDAVARKAR. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009, pp. xi, 270, Pds. 53.00 (ISBN 978-0-521-76871-9).

Theater of Conflict, City of Hope: Mumbai, 1660 to Present Times. By MARIAM DOSSAL. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2010, pp. xl, 252, Rs. 2450 (ISBN 0-19-806438-1).

Mumbai Fables. By GYAN PRAKASH. Princeton and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010, pp. xi, 396, \$29.95 (ISBN 978-0-691-14284-5).

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Abstract

This review examines three major books on the history of Bombay. Historians of the city have tended to focus primarily on the period before 1930; this tendency has seriously limited our understanding of the dramatic transformations that have taken place in Bombay over the course of the twentieth century. Each of the studies reviewed here devotes considerable attention to developments since the 1920s. Collectively these works make a significant contribution to the appreciation of such matters as working-class politics, the changing character of workers' neighbourhoods, land use, urban planning, and the ways the city has been imagined and experienced by its citizens. At the same time, these works all shift their analytic frameworks as they approach more contemporary periods and this restricts the authors' ability to assess fully the character of urban change. This paper calls upon historians to continue to apply the tools of social history, particularly its reliance on close microcosmic studies of particular places and groups over long periods of time, as they try to bridge the gap between the early twentieth century and the later twentieth century. At the same time, it suggests that historians need to consider Gyan Prakash's view of cities as 'patched-up societies' whose entirety cannot be understood through single, linear models of change.

* Nikhil Rao, Sujata Patel, Prashant Kidambi and Eric Beverley have offered suggestions on earlier versions of this review. Two anonymous reviewers for the journal also made valuable comments.

Introduction

Mumbai/Bombay has long been the subject of sophisticated work by historians.¹ A number of rich studies have addressed the expansion of the urban centre in the context of international trade and industry, the role of imperial policy in shaping the city's geographic contours, the formation of urban communities, business entrepreneurship, the development of the textile mills and working class politics, and the emergence of popular support for Indian nationalism. Collectively, this scholarship has shaped a picture of urbanization during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that may be superior in depth to work on any other South Asian city. Yet recent developments have highlighted the importance of formulating new approaches to the city's past. Most significantly, the picture of Bombay drawn in existing historical work does not help much in understanding the city its residents see around them. Historians rarely have strayed in their research beyond the early 1930s, when Bombay had not yet acquired many of its contemporary characteristics. After that time, the city expanded dramatically, in great part due to the development of its suburbs and the proliferation of vast urban slums. The local economy changed dramatically, bringing about major transformations in urban land use, a trend exemplified most dramatically by the closure of the textile mills and the replacement of working class neighbourhoods with the offices of global firms, high-rise apartments, luxury hotels, and shopping malls. The period after 1930 also witnessed a rapid acceleration of Bombay's most serious urban problems, including massive snags of transportation, water supply bottlenecks, pollution and a vast array of other environmental issues. Historical works have said very little about most of these developments. Nor has writing by historians typically addressed post-independence political changes in the city, such as the weakening of the Congress party, the shattering of local trade unions, the decline in working class support for the Communists, the growth of Dalit and feminist movements, the rising power of the Shiv Sena, the political role of gangsters, the development of collective violence targeting minorities, and the effects of terrorist actions taken by

¹ The official name of the city in English was changed in 1995 from 'Bombay' to 'Mumbai', after the Shiv Sena came to power in Maharashtra. Some residents still prefer the former name, regarding 'Mumbai' as possessing strong associations with regional chauvinism and associating 'Bombay' with a more cosmopolitan image of the city. This review will try to follow official usage as much as possible, employing the term 'Bombay' before the 1990s and 'Mumbai' for more recent periods.

Muslim radicals. Anthropologists, sociologists and political scientists have of course explored many of these subjects, yet their work rarely possesses significant historical depth.² Understanding the making of Mumbai's contemporary landscape particularly requires scholars to focus more intensively on the critical transformative period between the 1930s and the 1970s. These aspects of Bombay's historiography of course exemplify a more general problem in the historiography of South Asian cities, which has been very rich in its approach to pre-1920 urbanism but rather deficient in tackling more recent processes of urbanization.

A second factor that has created the need for new kinds of scholarship is a transformation in the historical consciousness of a segment of Mumbai's own upper middle class. Before the 1980s, local citizens showed relatively limited interest in Bombay's past; history was primarily an enterprise confined to academia, cut off from the rest of the city's intellectual culture. But the growing influence of heritage and architectural associations, citizens' committees, and environmental organizations—groups that have often hoped to block radical transformations in Mumbai's physical and political landscape—has prompted an increased fascination with history. This fascination is reflected in a certain nostalgia for aspects of the historical city that a generation earlier might have prompted highly critical perspectives: colonial architecture, working class neighbourhoods, slum settlements and docklands. A significant marketplace has emerged for work about Mumbai's past, as can be witnessed by the stacks of coffee table books for sale in the city's English-language bookstores. Lectures by visiting scholars can now sometimes attract large non-academic audiences. Hoping to break out of the narrow niche for academic books, publishers have tried to encourage authors to meet this market with works written in a more popular style, often with plenty of illustrations. Reaching the history-reading public of course also constitutes a major motivation to make significant efforts to relate past developments to the contemporary city.

² The inter-disciplinary scholarship of Sujata Patel and Thomas Blom Hansen, scholars who work in sociology and anthropology departments respectively but who have done significant historical research, is a significant exception. See especially Sujata Patel's introductory essay, 'Bombay and Mumbai: Identities, Politics and Populism,' in *Bombay and Mumbai: The City in Transition*. S. Patel and J. Masselos (eds), Oxford University Press, Delhi, 2003, pp. 3–30, and Thomas Blom Hansen, *Wages of Violence: Naming and Identity in Postcolonial Bombay*. Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2001.

The value of producing new forms of history is all the much greater because Mumbai seems more relevant than it once did to our understanding of South Asia's past. At one point, the Indian subcontinent's real history was assumed to lie in its rural areas, and much of the historical profession's best work was focused on the social and economic history of the countryside.³ Over the past decade or so, scholars have increasingly become concerned with understanding the historical construction of 'modernity', both with the ways 'being modern' has assumed significance in the identities of both the middle class *and* the poor, and with the forms of anxiety and dislocation that this has produced. As Sujata Patel and Alice Thorner have suggested, Bombay has served as an especially compelling 'metaphor for modernity', with its rapid economic growth, its large middle class, its cosmopolitan character, and its early record of popular involvement in national politics.⁴ Mumbai also seems to epitomize India's recent process of 'globalization'; the city is associated with the rise of new economic structures based on international capital and the shattering of old economies; with the formation of subcultures centred on film, television and the internet; and with the development of a mobile elite that regularly travels abroad for education, vacations and business.⁵ Finally, the recent growth in Mumbai of populist politics built on religious and regional loyalties and the violence that has sometimes accompanied this development exemplifies issues that have increasingly preoccupied scholars of the entire subcontinent. In short, the city no longer seems a special urban enclave whose social, cultural and political attributes mark it off from the rest of the subcontinent; rather, in some ways, it seems emblematic of important trends in South Asia. Understanding these developments of course serves as a further compelling reason for urban historians to try to break through the chronological barriers that have traditionally held them back.

The three books reviewed here transcend the boundaries between what traditionally has been seen as 'history'—the period before 1930—and the more recent past. At the same time they also illustrate the challenges involved in placing Bombay's history in frameworks that

³ Gyan Prakash, 'The Urban Turn' in Sarai Reader: The Cities of Everyday Life. Ravi Vasudevan et al. (eds), Centre for Developing Societies, Delhi, 2002.

⁴ S. Patel and A. Thorner, *Bombay: A Metaphor for Modern India*. Oxford University Press, Bombay, 1996.

⁵ A similar argument has been made in Prashant Kidambi, *The Making of an Indian Metropolis: Colonial Governance and Public Culture in Bombay, 1890–1920*, Ashgate, Aldershot, England, 2007, p. 8.

would permit a deeper appreciation of the contemporary city. Each of the authors turns here to new kinds of evidence that can be pieced together with more conventional sources only with some awkwardness. Each author also shifts to new modes of historical argumentation, writing and presentation sharply different not only from earlier histories of Mumbai but also from those that had characterized his or her earlier careers. Whilst each work makes a major contribution to understanding the transformations in the city after 1930, each raises significant methodological concerns about how best to analyze urban change.

History, Culture and the Indian City is a volume of essays written by Rajnarayan Chandavarkar, the leading social historian of the city before his tragic death in 2006. Chandavarkar was the author of many important articles as well as two path-breaking books, his monograph *The Origins of Industrial Capitalism in India: Business Strategies and the Working Classes in Bombay, 1900–1940* and a collection of essays, *Imperial Power and Popular Politics: Class, Resistance and the State in India, 1850–1950*.⁶ In those works, he forged a dynamic view of the city's history that highlighted processes of contestation, adaptation and accommodation. As he argued, the textile industry was shaped not just by the designs of a few captains of industry but by processes of negotiation and resistance at the workshop level; migrant workers developed strong commitments to the urban environment but maintained links to the countryside because employment in the city was so insecure; working-class neighbourhoods were constituted by constantly shifting relationships between residents and local power wielders; factory employees showed no simple tendency to evolve a 'working class consciousness' but shaped and reshaped their identities in the context of political conflicts between communists/trade unionists, Indian nationalists and Hindu communalists. Throughout these works, Chandavarkar showed a suspicion of unilinear narratives (from trade to industry, from peasant to worker, from pre-industrial consciousness to working class consciousness), and focused instead on the highly contingent and contested nature of historical processes. The same concerns led him to a rejection of 'culture', when the concept

⁶ A valuable list of Chandavarkar's significant publications is provided at the end of the volume. A major recent article written by Chandavarkar and published after his death but that is not listed there is 'The Decline and Fall of the Jobber System in the Bombay Cotton Textile Industry, 1870–1955,' *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 42, 1, January 2008, pp. 117–210.

was meant to suggest static commitments to rural mentalities, caste or religion.

The articles in *History, Culture and the City* were never conceived as a coherent whole by Chandavarkar. Rather they were assembled by several of his colleagues, mostly from essays left on his computers and in his office. They clearly represent work originating from many different points in his career. Some are highly polished products, whilst others represent oral presentations that Chandavarkar would no doubt have subjected to his highly exacting standards in revisions before publication, though these too provide us with a valuable record of his insights into a variety of historical subjects. The volume includes historiographic essays on state and society in India, on urban history and anthropology, and on labour; an article on the rural connections of the working class that presents Chandavarkar's well-known perspectives on the subject; writings covering contemporary political developments; and of course several pieces on Bombay's history. These essays are accompanied by two overviews of Chandavarkar's work written by Jennifer Davis and David Washbrook. Davis, Washbrook and Gordon Johnson should be commended for their efforts in bringing the volume to publication.

The most significant studies here are the ones on cities, especially Bombay. In his paper on urban history and urban anthropology in South Asia, Chandavarkar critiques attempts to categorize Indian cities through the use of generic types that stand in contrast with 'western' urban forms, whether those are based on cultural criteria such as the 'ceremonial city' or the 'Islamic city', or on the effects of imperialism such as the 'colonial' and 'colonial port' city. He argues instead that South Asian cities should be seen as outcomes of processes shaped by the relationship between specific social classes (particularly mercantile capitalists) and the wider political economy. This essay sets out especially interesting hypotheses about urban change after 1930. Chandavarkar suggests that the rapid urbanization that began around this time was in part brought about by the drying up of economic opportunities in the countryside, which led agrarian capitalists to move their investments to urban places and caused desperate rural people to migrate to cities in search of employment. Another excellent essay here is a history of sewers in Bombay, also apparently written during the early 1990s. It highlights in rich detail the contradictory pressures that slowed the provision of urban services in the city, especially to the poor. After the late nineteenth century, colonial administrators and local elites came to see urban health as an increasingly urgent

issue but because they prioritized low taxation and infrastructural expenditures that would serve business and industry, improvement in public services proceeded in a piecemeal fashion and in ways that favoured the neighbourhoods of the wealthy.

Perhaps the two most original essays in the volume are ones that explicitly address the transformations in Bombay over the past several decades. Until 2004, Chandavarkar had not explicitly dealt with post-1940 developments in his historical writings on the city. But his concern about the political direction the city was taking and his connections to local activists with a strong interest in the city's past seemingly led him to new kinds of work. One essay, 'From neighbourhood to nation: the rise and fall of the Left in Bombay's Girangaon in the twentieth century', is republished here from its earlier place as an introduction to Meena Menon and Neera Adarkar's fascinating collection of oral histories of mill workers, a book that is well known in Mumbai but that has attracted relatively little attention elsewhere.⁷ In a 70-page essay, Chandavarkar charts the history of Girangaon, a neighbourhood that had figured extensively in *Origins of Industrial Capitalism*. He draws together evidence from his own research with material coming from the oral histories, capturing the social texture of working-class life and politics even more richly than in his earlier work. The essay's central analytic focus is the gradual marginalization of workers and of the communists who advocated their interests. Chandavarkar attributes this process to a variety of causes: the failure of the Left to continue to adapt to changing political contexts as it fell behind doctrinal lines based upon Soviet orthodoxy; the increasingly successful strategies developed by local capitalists and the state to neutralize working-class actions; the rise of a Maharashtrian linguistic nationalism (a development at first embraced by the communists themselves but that ultimately played into the hands of the Shiv Sena); the Sena's ability to insinuate itself in local neighbourhoods by deploying violence and dispersing political patronage; the erosion of many working-class institutions and leaderships; and disastrous miscalculations made by local unions in the 1982 textile strike. Though it was conceived as the introduction to Menon and Adarkar's book, the essay might be the most significant publication on the history of the city during the last decade. The other

⁷ One Hundred Years, One Hundred Voices: The Mill-Workers of Girangaon: An Oral History. Meena Menon and Neera Adarkar (eds), Seagull Press, Calcutta and New Delhi, 2004.

article based on a similar chronological framework is the opening contribution to the volume, 'Bombay's Perennial Modernities'. This piece is less a research essay than an impassioned statement about the shattering of Bombay's cosmopolitan political framework in which the working classes had once carved out a significant place even as they were subject to exploitation and even repression. Chandavarkar particularly highlights the expansion of violence and intolerance in local political life, and the dissipation of Mumbai's 'modernity' into what he calls the city's 'archaic divisions' (p. 29).

Chandavarkar's break in these two essays from some of his earlier approaches is profound but has not been noticed extensively by commentators on his work, including the authors of the introduction and postscript to this volume. For one thing, whilst he still criticizes strongly static notions of workers' culture drawn from the writings of nonworkers, he makes significant room in his analysis for the role of cultural practices. Drawing upon evidence present in Menon and Adarkar's oral histories, the essay devotes many pages to discussing a popular culture in Girangaon associated with street life and religious celebration. These cultural forms played a creative role in shaping local identities, and shifted their character in major ways between the 1920s and the 1980s.

Even more strikingly, Chandavarkar demonstrates a willingness to chart unambiguous, unidirectional historical trends. He traces a clear pattern of disintegration in workers' political identifications with class-based politics, in contrast to his position in earlier works, which described identities as in constant flux in different political contexts. Both these essays posit accounts of decline, whether of cosmopolitanism or of the power of the Left. The poor are depicted here as having steadily lost their power in the more recent past. At one point, for instance, he writes, 'the Shiv Sena offered a kind of citizenship to workers, *now seemingly disenfranchised and wholly subordinated*, and created an arena in which they could at least fleetingly make a claim for dignity and equality (p. 26, italics mine)'. This claim is a striking contrast to the perspective taken in Chandavarkar's previous work, which had always portrayed the poor as having some kind of ability to influence structures of power through their actions, whether or not they were represented by organized political forces. Does this mean that the analytic framework he developed in relation to earlier periods is irrelevant to understanding more recent developments? Or have the poor come to contest power relations in their neighbourhoods and workplaces in new ways that historians have not yet examined,

even if the communists and trade unions have been reduced to a state of ineffectiveness? Unfortunately, due to his untimely death, we will not know how Chandavarkar would have resolved the seeming conflict between his perspectives on the early twentieth century and his view of more recent time periods.

Like Chandavarkar, Mariam Dossal is a scholar who has devoted her career to the study of the history of Bombay. Her major earlier work, *Imperial Designs and Indian Realities: the Planning of Bombay City, 1845–1875* (Oxford University Press, Bombay 1991), examined British imperial urban planning in Bombay and the efforts of local interest groups to influence the shape of imperial policy. *Theater of Conflict, City of Hope* takes up some of the themes addressed in that book, but adopts as its focus the issue of urban land, a problem that has curiously been neglected in the literature on Indian cities. Dossal explores land policy in Bombay from the time of its acquisition in 1660 to the present, and she clearly sees understanding the development of current patterns in land use as a major purpose of her study. She suggests in the introduction that one objective of her work is to create an understanding of Mumbai's history relevant to issues raised by 'concerned citizens, environmentalists, and administrators' (p. xxi) about the model of development that has been followed in the city. Her book includes vast amounts of interesting visual material, such as pictures of government documents, photographs and especially images of historical maps. This is both a serious academic study and an attractive coffee table book—quite a rare combination outside work on art history.

Dossal's contributions here are twofold. First, she documents changes in the use of land in Bombay over the entire period she has examined. Much of the book's opening sections discuss lands that were transformed from agricultural to commercial and industrial uses as the city expanded; as a result, this book addresses key issues in urban environmental history more directly than either of the other two works reviewed here. In the nineteenth century, Dossal shows, the British levelled Bombay's hills and filled in the waters between its islands to create more space for urban development. In her sections on the early twentieth century, Dossal discusses the formation of Bombay's suburbs on Salsette Island, government plans to create space for middle class housing, and a variety of programmes to reclaim land from the sea. Whilst the author might have given a more systematic idea of the ways in which the city expanded and land uses changed after the mid-nineteenth century, perhaps by providing maps illustrating these

processes (in addition to the excellent maps she provides on earlier periods), this book clearly is the best available source on the overall history of Bombay's changing urban landscape.

Second, the book discusses in much detail efforts by the state, both before and after independence, to gain control over urban land as well as the struggles of urban residents against these efforts. Dossal discusses a series of measures taken up by the British government to survey and tax land after the early nineteenth century, state efforts to acquire land for public uses, and legislation regulating how Bombay's citizens made use of their own properties. She draws upon the extensive records of the Maharashtra State Archives to illustrate the range of resistances by local groups to government attempts to take over lands and control local land use. Whilst sweeping in its scope, *Theater of Conflict, City of Hope* stops at a number of moments to provide us with rich detail of some of these disputes, such as the case of Navibai Ludha, a late nineteenth century widow who fought for control over her family's properties repeatedly before the High Court.

In the last two chapters, Dossal takes up post-1930 developments in the city. Much of her discussion of the years between 1930 and 1960 concerns the visions of Bombay put forward by individual architects and urban planners; this was the period when an idea of creating a master plan for the city first emerged and when policymakers devoted concerted attention to addressing the urban housing shortage. The final chapter provides new information on a number of subjects that are familiar in non-historical writings, such as the role of the builders' lobby in undercutting efforts to provide adequate lands for housing the poor, the transfiguration of the mill neighbourhoods, Bombay's rental laws, and schemes to redevelop slum areas. A less well known topic covered here is the transformation of the city's docklands and salt pans. Dossal's book is the first to bring together the examination of such a wide range of contemporary land issues in a single volume.

As Dossal discusses more recent trends, however, the perspective of her study shifts significantly. Whereas the early parts of this book often offer a rich social history of land use, much of the last two chapters is in essence an intellectual and policy history based upon architects' plans, committee reports and other published overviews of contemporary problems. As a result, these chapters provide only a limited sense of how disputes over land at the local level have changed over time or how shifts in land use patterns have been experienced by ordinary Mumbaikars, perhaps in part due to the

limitations of the available source material on more recent periods in the Maharashtra State Archives. Because Dossal has altered her analytic frame in these chapters, it is difficult to appreciate whether current land conflicts over the last few decades are fundamentally different from those of earlier periods. Do efforts by interest groups in the recent past that undermine municipal plans simply continue older strategies that blocked imperial policies through litigation and surreptitious encroachment on public property? Has the advent of democracy empowered the poor in any way to affect the policies surrounding slum lands and urban services? Has the recent rise of citizens' committees checked some of the more intrusive efforts by the state and local capitalists to transform urban land use? Conversely, does the use of violence and political corruption give local capitalists unprecedented power in determining land utilization patterns?

Unlike Chandavarkar and Dossal, Gyan Prakash had not worked on Bombay's history before taking up research on the city about a decade ago. His previous major books were rigorous academic studies—steeped in the approach and writing styles associated with postcolonial studies—about agrarian labour and colonial science. As he makes clear in *Mumbai Fables*, his interest in Bombay stemmed from the allure the city and its cinema offered him as a youth living in eastern India and from a more recent scholarly conviction that the study of urban places has become central to the discipline of history. Prakash writes here in a non-academic language and treats subjects that many older, upper middle class residents of the city would remember well. Prakash goes further than Chandavarkar and Dossal in breaking from traditional disciplinary constraints by devoting the bulk of his history to the period after 1930.

In his introduction, Prakash questions standard narratives of Mumbai as a place moving from 'the bounded unity of the city of industrial capitalism to the "generic city" of globalization, from modernity to postmodernity, from cosmopolitanism to communalism' (p. 23). The introduction in effect proposes two different ways he plans to challenge those narratives in the book. The first is to examine the development of the myth of Bombay's historical evolution and to deconstruct that fable in the process: 'What enabled the composition of the city's image as a "tropical Camelot" in the past, and what has produced the picture of the dysfunctional, out-of-control city in the present?' (p. 23). The second is to offer an alternative understanding of the city's past. He proposes viewing Mumbai 'as a modern city, as a society built from scratch,' as a 'patched-up' society 'composed

of strangers' (p. 23), and as a 'tapestry of different, overlapping and contradictory experiences, imaginations and desires' (p. 348).

The first line of argument rests somewhat lightly on the book. Prakash examines the way the city has been imagined in a variety of contexts, but is rarely explicit in the body of the book about how the episodes he examines have contributed to the dominant narrative about Mumbai's history. He returns to this theme extensively, however, in the conclusion. By contrast, the book significantly substantiates the second argument. Much of the work consists of a wide-ranging set of essays on various aspects of the city at different moments in time. Unlike the social historians, Prakash does not seek to examine processes lying outside the public sphere that might have escaped the citizens' notice or try to unearth the everyday actions of ordinary people. If anything, his effort highlights for contemporary readers developments that attracted widespread attention at the time they took place, whether these were political conflicts over development schemes or sensational murder trials whose marks on Mumbai were more cultural than physical. By bringing these distinct accounts together into a single volume, Prakash effectively demonstrates that an assemblage of diverse practices and cultural projects has served to constitute the city.

Many of Prakash's chapters will be invaluable to historians of Mumbai, and a less eclectic, more conventional, urban history could not have possibly brought them to light. For instance, we learn in this study about the sub-culture forged by the vibrant communities of Left-leaning intellectuals and artists during the 1940s and 1950s, including such figures as Saadat Hasan Manto, Ismat Chughtai, Mulk Raj Anand and Raj Thapar. The chapter on the Shiv Sena, in my view, provides the most useful overview yet of the organization's history.

Chapter seven offers a superb discussion of the ways urban planners in Mumbai infused their schemes with modernist and nationalist fantasies of a city in which overcrowded housing, traffic congestion and slums would disappear. Prakash's account of the New Bombay scheme after 1964, in which planners envisioned an alternative urban centre to the north and east is especially compelling; he in effect attributes much of the failure of the scheme to the modernist sterility of the planners' dreams, which gave little scope to the social needs of Bombay residents or to the messy political interests that ultimately were bound to assert themselves in a democratic context.

The limitation of an approach based upon fragments that get picked up at moments of high visibility and then are dropped, however, is

that we learn little about processes of urban change, a concern that seems to lie outside Prakash's objectives. Issues like the formation of slums or suburbs come into focus for short periods, but then disappear from view quickly. Prakash makes only a limited attempt to draw connections between an interesting early chapter about conflicts over urban plans in the 1920s and 1930s and his later discussion of planning in the 1960s and 1970s. We do not learn how the concerns taken up in Left-leaning intellectual circles during the 1950s became transformed in the period from the 1970s to the 2000s; it might be interesting to understand whether contemporary intellectual culture in Mumbai has antecedents in this earlier period. Thus whilst the flexible structure of *Mumbai Fables* allows Prakash to highlight the contingent character of Bombay's history and to depict what the meaning of urbanity has been to different sets of actors in different periods, it provides only a partial understanding of shifts in the character of the city over time. Prakash rightly questions the value of unilinear narratives, but does not contribute alternative analyses of long-term urban transformations.

In short, by tackling a variety of important urban issues in Bombay since 1930—the history of gender relations and of caste-based politics are notable exceptions—each of these books demonstrates the value of crossing the chronological boundaries that have long divided historical work from the scholarship in other disciplines and of utilizing forms of writing that have the ability to attract wider audiences. Each provides rich new understandings of the more recent past. At the same time, each illustrates the difficulty of developing an approach that would enable us to appreciate Bombay's changing character over the course of the twentieth century. In effect the authors all shift their frame of reference as they discuss recent developments. Chandavarkar's examination of the single neighbourhood of Girangaon offers the richest existing account of transformations in urban space from pre-independence to post-independence. Yet when it comes to examining the recent past, the author turns to a mode of analysis that differs from his work on earlier periods in that it seems to deny the capacity of subordinate classes to influence the structures of power. Dossal's explanation of contests over property in the periods before the early twentieth century is richly evocative and her treatment of elite discussions of land issues in Bombay in more recent periods makes a valuable contribution to our knowledge of the city. The changing character of source material in the two parts of her study and an abrupt shift in the book's analytical frame, however, make it difficult to appreciate the relationship between social practices associated with

pre-1930 land use and those involved in more recent patterns of land utilization. Prakash's innovative examination of critical episodes in Mumbai's recent past suggests the wide range of phenomena involved in the making of a city from scratch. Yet his constant and sometimes abrupt movement between subject matters inhibits analysis of long-term change.

These books mark only the beginning of an effort to broach the divide between research on Bombay during the early twentieth century and work on the more recent past. Hopefully, future scholars will be even less bound by rigid definitions about what constitutes 'history'. Some historians might assume that their discipline is not yet ready for this enterprise, that new methodologies and new analytic frameworks will have to be created in order to appreciate a past that includes relatively contemporary developments. At the very least, a new historiography of Mumbai will require scholars to search for new kinds of source materials; Chandavarkar's use of the interviews collected by Menon and Adarkar suggests that oral history may be especially helpful. Yet, if anything, this essay has indicated that future work on Mumbai might rely even more intensively upon some of the traditional strengths of social history as it moves into more recent, and more politically charged, subject matters. History writing on the city after 1930, for instance, would continue to benefit from intensive studies of local socio-political environments, from the examination of processes of change over relatively long periods of time, and from a focus on social conflicts over economic relations, land usages, and state policies in which the poor are also participants. In other words, historians might rely on the approaches that have been sources of strength in Chandavarkar's and Dossal's treatments of pre-1930 developments. At this point the greatest potential for understanding urban change in Mumbai seems to lie in microcosmic examinations of specific phenomena such as neighbourhoods, suburbs and slums, intellectual circles, and ethnic communities over many decades.⁸ But as they adopt new chronological frameworks, historians will need to keep in mind, as Prakash suggests and as conventional social history often has not recognized, that reassembling the city's past into a new narrative that

⁸ Nikhil Rao has been particularly involved in doing work that crosses older chronological barriers, including his recent book, *House, but no Garden: Apartment Living in Bombay's Suburbs, 1898-1964*, University of Minnesota Minneapolis, 2013. See also, 'Towards Greater Bombay: Town Planning and the Politics of Urban Growth, 1915-1964' (unpublished essay, 2011).

has a single coherent logic will not be possible. The history of Mumbai will remain a patchwork of developments, and no universal model of change will neatly encapsulate its character.

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